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Monetary Poverty Estimates in Sri Lanka: Selected Issues

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and Dinushka Senanayake

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October 2004

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FOREWORD

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ABBREVIATIONS

CBN	Cost of Basic Needs
CBSL	Central Bank of Sri Lanka
CFS	Consumer Finances and Socio-Economic Surveys
DCI	Direct Calorie Intake
DCS	Department of Census and Statistics
FEI	Food Energy Intake
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
LFS	Sri Lanka Labor Force Survey

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an introduction to poverty-related data available in Sri Lanka and monetary measurements of poverty carried out using this data. The lack of an official poverty line in Sri Lanka until June 2004 has over time generated a number of poverty lines and corresponding poverty measures. While these poverty measures have provided a good base for poverty analysis, the paper also touches on the problems generated by the use of multiple methods. The release of the official poverty line by the Department of Census and Statistics can be seen as a major step forward in the debate on poverty measurement in Sri Lanka.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka's impressive social achievement in the midst of modest economic performance has made it a subject of interest both nationally and internationally. Sri Lanka is a popular case study in the "growth vs. welfare" literature as well as in the subsequent "adjustment with a human face" debate. Interest in the country did not wane even when it shifted policy in the late 1970s from welfare orientation to growth orientation, but continued to address issues faced by disadvantaged sectors of society. When international interest thus turned to poverty alleviation in the 1980s, the Government of Sri Lanka already had decades of experience in addressing the issue at both a policy and implementation level.

The focus of this paper is on poverty-related data and corresponding measurements available in Sri Lanka, including estimates of poverty carried out using this data.¹ The paper aims to provide an introduction into the monetary estimates of poverty in Sri Lanka and the data available to carry out these estimates. Some issues such as the methods of calculating the poverty line are discussed in greater depth than others, such as the human development indicators of poverty.

It must be highlighted that there has been a high level of dynamism among the institutions involved in poverty data and poverty measurement during the last few years. The Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) and the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL), as the two major sources of data, have been in close dialog along with other related professionals in relation to improving the database and addressing the gap left by the lack of an official poverty line. The DCS is tasked with the responsibility of developing the official poverty line.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section II provides a discussion of the key data sets that are produced by various government agencies in Sri Lanka and provide pertinent information on not only poverty, but economic activity of the poor and nonpoor. Section III covers poverty-related issues, including measurement and poverty estimates. It also provides, in brief, a poverty profile and discusses some of the causes of poverty. Section IV describes the nature of distribution in incomes and consumption expenditures as captured by household survey data. Section V concerns itself with nonincome indicators related to poverty. Finally, Section VI concludes.

¹ This paper was initially prepared as a background paper to inform the discussion at the Inception Workshop of Building a Poverty Database (RETA 5917). While the paper has been updated from its initial form presented in July 2001, it must be noted that the paper was finalized as the official poverty line and the related incidence of poverty was made public by the Department of Census and Statistics in June 2004. This information has been included in Appendix 1.

II. DATA SOURCES

A. Department of Census and Statistics

The scientific collection of data was institutionalized in Sri Lanka in 1871 with the setting up of the Department of Census and Statistics to undertake development of a comprehensive database of aggregated and disaggregated quantitative information on socioeconomic dimensions of Sri Lankan society.

Since its inception, the DCS has carried out a vast range of scheduled and special surveys (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
SELECTED DATA SOURCES FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF CENSUS AND STATISTICS

NAME OF PUBLICATION	FIRST AVAILABLE	LATEST AVAILABLE
Census of Population and Housing (CPH)	1871	2001
Agricultural Census Survey	1940	2002 (Preliminary Release No 3)
Statistical Abstract	1949	2003
Statistical Pocket Book	1966	2003
Socio-Economic Survey	1969/70	Restructured as LFSES
Labour Force and Socio Economic Survey (LFSES)	1980/81	1985/86 Restructured as HIES and LFS
Annual Survey of Industries	1984	2001
Census of Public and Semi Government Sector Employment	1985	2002 (Preliminary)
Demography and Health Survey	1986/87	2000
Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES)	1990	2002
Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey	1990 (1 st quarter)	2003 (2 nd quarter)
Food Balance Sheet	1993	2002

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka.

Of the above sources, the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) is the most widely used in the study of poverty in Sri Lanka. The HIES uses a random sample of approximately 20,000 households, collecting comprehensive data on household income and expenditure, and less detailed information on demography, agriculture, employment, and related matters. Data is tabulated at both the national and district levels.

The latest HIES was conducted in 2002. A special feature of the survey was its inclusion of the northern and eastern provinces, which have been excluded from coverage since 1985 due to the unstable political and security situation in those areas. The 2002 HIES aims to calculate a separate poverty line for the north and east, in order to better capture the special nature of poverty in those regions. However, as there was a time lag between the completion of the data collection in the north and east as against the rest of the country, the poverty data for these provinces are not yet available despite the publication of the Final Report of the HIES 2002 in May 2004.

B. Central Bank of Sri Lanka

In addition to the DCS, the other agency involved in generating statistical data is the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL), which is vested with the responsibility of monitoring the national economy. The CBSL conducts the Consumer Finances and Socio-Economic Surveys (CFS), which obtain data on demographic features, socioeconomic conditions, labor force, employment and unemployment, income, expenditure, consumption, saving, investment, loans, etc. However, the data is tabulated only at the national and zonal level² and the small sample size (less than 10,000) does not make it conducive to further disaggregation.

As in the case of HIES data, CFS data collected every 5 years has been used when calculating national poverty levels. The 2003/2004 is the latest CFS and the data is yet to be published. As the HIES and the CFS were carried out in consecutive years, which resulted in 4-year gaps in the availability of poverty-related data in Sri Lanka, DCS and CBSL are currently working on an adjustment of data collection dates that would provide data within shorter intervals.

C. Other Sources

Most line ministries carry out data collection under the guidance of DCS, to meet their specific needs. Data sets with wider application are produced by the following:

- (i) Ministry of Agriculture produces data on cost of production, farm gate prices for different crops, types of crops cultivated, and their location; and conducts studies through its Socio-Economic Policy Division on different dimensions of agricultural households.
- (ii) Ministry of Health and Indigenous Medicine generates data on health care, health education, nutrition, behavioral changes, and incidence of diseases, and publishes these on a regular basis in its Annual Health Bulletin. In addition, it collects monthly information on birth weight of children, nutritional status of children under five, immunization, etc., through its Public Health Midwives and network of Mother and Child Clinics.
- (iii) Ministry of Education collects data on school populations, dropout rates, teacher-pupil ratios, and state expenditure per child by school category. In relation to tertiary education, state expenditure per student by academic course, and related characteristics of students and students' households are collated by the University Grants Commission.

² The CBSL divided the 25 districts into four zones. Zone 1: Colombo (excluding households in the Colombo municipality), Gampaha, Kalutara, Galle, and Matara. Zone 2: Hambantota, Moneragala, Ampara, Polonnaruwa, Anuradhapura, and Puttalam. Zone 3: Jaffna, Mannar, Vavuniya, Kilinochchi, Trincomalee, and Batticaloa. Zone 4: Kandy, Matale, Nuwara Eliya, Badulla, Ratnapura, Kegalle, and Kurunegala. Zone 5: areas falling under the Colombo municipality.

- (iv) Provincial Councils collect regional data on labor force, agriculture, industries, transport, health, education, social services, etc. disaggregated by district and divisional secretariat, which is consolidated by the provincial planning unit of each province.

III. MEASURING POVERTY

Until recently Sri Lanka did not have an official poverty line. As a result, over the last several years, various individuals or groups of individuals working in their capacity as independent researchers have made estimates of the poverty line, both at national and sectoral levels. For practical purposes, these estimates have acted as national estimates with various government and other agencies using them for policy and targeting of poverty interventions. More recently, DCS, the key data source, has published its own poverty figures based on poverty lines calculated by Vidyaratne and Tilakaratne (2003) for 1995/96, using HIES 1995/96 data. However, the major change has come with the HIES 2002 report, which has for the first time a special section that estimates the incidence of poverty at the national, sectoral, provincial, and district levels. Hence, unlike previous HIES where a headcount index was not available until a few years after the release of the survey data, measures of the poverty incidence and the HIES 2002 were released simultaneously in 2003.

A. Poverty Lines for Sri Lanka

The duality of the policy focus on poverty in Sri Lanka and the lack of an official poverty line until June 2004 have created a situation where multiple poverty lines have been calculated over the years, and generated substantial critical analysis (see for example, Alailima 1986; Hopkins and Jogaratnam 1990; Lakshman 1997, 1998; Tudawe 2000; Gunewardena 2004b).

Table 2 highlights the various data sources as well as methodology used in calculating poverty lines during the last 30 years. Despite the variance and controversy in methodology and lack of official recognition, these estimates are used on an ad hoc basis by various government as well as nongovernment agencies to guide national poverty alleviation programs³ and strategize poverty-targeted interventions.

³ However, the governments' current poverty alleviation program "Samurdhi", adopts its own measure of poverty to identify beneficiaries. Households whose monthly income is less than Rs. 1500 are defined as poor.

TABLE 2
VARIOUS POVERTY LINES FOR SRI LANKA

RELEVANT YEAR	POVERTY LINE/ PERSON/ MONTH	BASE	DATA SOURCE	SOURCE
1969/70	Rs. 21	Price adjusted food expenditure line computed by Gunaratne (1985)	LFSS 1970	Bhalla and Glewwe (1986)
1978/79	Rs. 70	Per capita monthly food expenditure of the bottom 40% of the households	CFS 1981/82	Gunaratne (1985)
1981/82	Rs. 106	Rs. 70 inflated by the self calculated food price index	CFS 1981/82	Gunaratne (1985)
1985	Rs. 202	2,500 calories and 53 grams of protein per adult male equivalent.	HIES 1985/86	Nanayakkara and Premaratne (1987)
1990/91	Lower: Rs. 471 Higher: Rs. 565	Cost of Basic Needs, i.e., food (anchored on Nanayakkara and Premaratne's food poverty line) and nonfood consumption 20% higher than the lower poverty line	HIES 1990/91	Datt and Gunewardena (1997)
1995/96	Lower: Rs. 791 Higher: Rs. 950	Cost of Basic Needs, i.e., food (anchored on Nanayakkara and Premaratne's food poverty line) and nonfood consumption 20% higher than the lower poverty line	HIES 1995/96	Gunewardena (2000)
1995/96	Rs. 953	Cost of Basic Needs, i.e., food (food poverty line calculated on the food basket of the 2 nd -4 th deciles) and nonfood consumption	HIES 1995/96	Vidyaratne and Tilakaratne (2003)
1996/97	Lower: Rs.. 860 Higher: Rs.. 1032	The poverty line of 1995/96 adjusted to current price 20% higher than the lower poverty line	CFS 1996/1997	Pradhan (1999)
2002	Rs. 1294	The Minimum Required Adult Equivalent Food Expenditure is used as the national poverty line and is calculated for households whose (i) in the lowest income quartile, (ii) food expenditure is over 50% of total expenditure, and (iii) whose daily caloric intake is between 2475-2750	HIES 2002	Report on HIES (DCS 2003)
1990-2002		See Appendix 1	HIES relevant years	DCS (2004)

Sources: Derived from Lakshman (1998), Tudawe (2000), and sources as cited.

B. Calculating Poverty Lines: Choice of Methods⁴

Sri Lankan researchers have predominantly favored the Cost of Basic Needs (CBN) method⁵ in calculating poverty lines over both the Direct Calorie Intake (DCI) and the Food Energy Intake (FEI) methods.⁶

Although the CBN method has been the favored method over its alternatives, it is not without drawbacks. The selection of the food component could have a certain degree of arbitrariness, as there exists a number of different combinations that would satisfy the minimum caloric requirements. In Sri Lanka, CBN also poses the problem of deriving sectoral and regional poverty lines in the absence of reliable cross sectional price data at the subnational level.

Most of the poverty lines relevant to the last two decades are based on the derivations of Nanayakkara and Premaratne (1987). For 1985, these authors set 2,500 calories and 53 grams of protein as the minimum requirement of an ordinary adult who is 20-39 years of age. They then estimated the cost of this food bundle, which they found to be Rs. 202 in 1985/86 prices.

Datt and Gunewardena (1997) and Gunewardena (2000) provide comparable poverty measures over three HIES surveys. They took as their point of departure the estimates by Nanayakkara and Premaratne (1987). Taking the food bundle of Nanayakkara and Premaratne as given and adding to it a nonfood component, the reference poverty line for Sri Lanka in 1995/96 was estimated as Rs. 792 in the prices of that year. Gunewardena (2000) also estimates regional poverty lines by using spatial food price indices for 1995/96. The national and subnational poverty lines calculated by Gunewardena (2000) are shown in Table 3.

⁴ Details on two poverty lines are provided in Appendix 1 and 2, respectively. Appendix 1 describes the newly announced official poverty line while Appendix 2 describes the poverty line used by Gunewardena (2000).

⁵ The CBN method identifies a consumption bundle that is adequate for fulfilling one's basic needs and estimates the cost of that bundle. The bundle consists of two components, namely, a food component and a nonfood component. The food component constitutes that quantity of food that satisfies the minimum nutritional requirement of an ordinary adult, while the nonfood component comprises shelter, clothing, transportation, and other items that are indispensable to an individual's or household's participation in community life.

⁶ The DCI method calculates the minimum required daily calorie intake for an adult equivalent, and all households whose caloric intake is less than the required intake are classified as poor. The FEI method translates the minimum required caloric intake per adult equivalent into monetary values. In the calculation of the food expenditure, a nonfood component gets added automatically. All households whose expenditure is less than the calculated figure are classified as poor.

TABLE 3
POVERTY LINES, 1995/96
(RS./PERSON/MONTH AT CURRENT PRICES)

REGION	SECTOR	FOOD POVERTY LINE	GENERAL POVERTY LINE
Western	Rural	641.22	803.56
	Urban	712.94	902.48
Central	Rural	616.72	751.37
	Urban	619.97	772.44
Southern	Rural	605.32	742.87
	Urban	663.05	853.67
N. Western and N. Central	Rural	688.06	857.13
	Urban	654.85	856.91
South Central	Rural	603.84	738.43
	Urban	620.97	776.25
Sri Lanka		641.82	791.67

Source: Gunewardena (2000).

Working with the same data set (HIES 1995/96), alternative estimates were made of the poverty line by Vidyaratne and Tilakaratne in 2003. Using a caloric norm of 2,030 per person per day, they estimated the total poverty line for Sri Lanka as Rs. 953, the food poverty line as Rs. 591, and the nonfood poverty line as Rs. 362. These estimates broken down into sectors and selected provinces are shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4
FOOD, NONFOOD, AND TOTAL POVERTY LINE BY SECTOR AND PROVINCE, 1995/96
(RS./PERSON/MONTH)

SECTOR	TOTAL	FOOD	NONFOOD
Sectors			
Urban	—	625	—
Rural	—	587	—
Estate ⁷	—	602	—
Provinces			
Western	1002	627	375
Central	973	599	374
Southern	946	586	360
North-Western	929	581	348
North-Central	931	577	354
Uva	928	579	349
Sabaragamuwa	959	599	360
Northern	—	—	—
Eastern	—	—	—
Sri Lanka	953	591	362

Source: Vidyaratne and Tilakaratne (2003).

⁷ The three sectors popularly used in Sri Lanka are urban, rural, and estate. The DCS defines the estate sector as plantation areas having more than 20 acres (8 hectares) and more than 10 residential laborers under a single administration.

C. Poverty Incidence

1. Headcount Index

Though there seems to be no agreement regarding the definition of poverty and poverty lines in Sri Lanka, there is broad consensus regarding the basic trend and nature of poverty. It is generally accepted that poverty levels show a falling trend with approximately 25 percent of the population facing conditions of consumption poverty, as of the late 1990s. In terms of sectoral variance, poverty has been consistently highest in the rural sector and lowest in the urban sector. While the estate sector has a lower incidence of consumption poverty than the rural sector, qualitative studies have shown that the estate sector faces higher levels of human and social deprivation as estate populations have lower education achievements, less access to health care, greater housing density, etc.

TABLE 5
VARYING POVERTY LINES AND ESTIMATES OF POVERTY IN SRI LANKA

DATA SOURCE	STUDY	INCIDENCE OF POVERTY				POVERTY LINE
		SRI LANKA	URBAN	RURAL	ESTATE	
LFSS (DCS 1970)	Bhalla and Glewwe (1986)	11.2	5.0	12.8	11.1	Per capita food expenditure Rs. 70 per month at 1978/79 prices
CFS (CBSL 1973)	Anand and Harris (1985)	27.6	22.7	31.6	8.1	Per capita food expenditure Rs. 70 per month at 1978/79 prices
CFS (CBSL 1983)	Anand and Harris (1985)	12.3	14.3	12.8	3.6	Per capita food expenditure Rs. 60 per month at 1978/79 prices
CFS (CBSL 1983)	Gunaratne (1985)	22.3	19.4	25.0	7.6	Per capita food expenditure Rs. 70 per month at 1978/79 prices
LFSS (DCS 1985/86)	Korale (1987)	39.4	27.6	45.7	5.7	Average household income per month needed to meet minimum nutrition (2,200 cal) and basic needs: Urban Rs. 1920, Rural Rs. 1610, Estate Rs. 1451
LFSS (DCS 1985/86)	Datt and Gunewardena (1997)	27.33	16.43	31.67	14.31	Lower poverty line: Rs. 471.20 per person per month in 1990/91 prices
		40.6	26.78	45.48	30.85	Higher poverty line: Rs. 565.44 per person per month in 1990/91 prices

(continued next page)

TABLE 5 (CONTINUED)

DATA SOURCE	STUDY	INCIDENCE OF POVERTY				POVERTY LINE
		SRI LANKA	URBAN	RURAL	ESTATE	
HIES (DCS 1990/91)	Datt and Gunewardena (1997)	22.36	18.31	24.41	12.62	Lower poverty line: Rs. 471.20 per person per month in 1990/91 prices
		35.34	28.43	38.05	27.51	Rs. 565.44 per person per month in 1990/91
HIES (DCS 1995/96)	Gunewardena (2000) Lower poverty line	25.17	14.67	26.95	24.92	Adjusted food poverty line Rs. 791.67 per person per month
	Higher poverty line	39.2	24.94	41.33	45.32	20% higher than the lower poverty line. Food poverty line Rs. 950.00 per person per month
HIES (DCS 1995/96)	Vidyaratne and Tilakaratne ⁸ (2003)	39.1	21.0	22.3	19.6	Rs. 953 per person per month
CFS (CBSL 1996/97)	Pradhan (1999)	18.9	10.9	20.3	17.5	Adjusted food poverty line Rs. 860.00 per person per month
HIES (DCS 2002)	DCS (2002)	27.9	9.7	31.0	27.9	Rs. 1294 per adult equivalent per month
HIES (various)	DCS (2004)					See Annex 1

Sources: Derived from Lakshman (1998), Tudawe (2000), and sources as cited.

2. Regional Disparities

Table 6 carries the household incidence of poverty as measured by the HIES 2002. The table indicates the downward trend of poverty not just at the national level but also at the sectoral, provincial, and district levels. As previously mentioned, the Final Report of the HIES 2002 does not include estimates of poverty for the North East. However, the DCS is in the process of estimating such figures and the release of such data is anticipated in the very near future. By 2002, the poverty incidence among households at the national level was down to 23.9 percent, from 26.7 percent in 1995/96 and 30.4 percent in 1990/91.

⁸ The incidence of poverty for the three sectors is based on the food poverty lines, not the total poverty line.

At the provincial level, the same improvement in the poverty situation can be seen. All provinces experienced a reduction in the percentage of poor households from 1990/91 to 2002.

The same observation can be made with respect to all districts with the exception of the Hambantota and Ratnapura districts, which experienced an increase in the levels of poverty from 1990/91 to 2002.

TABLE 6
PERCENTAGE OF POOR⁹ HOUSEHOLDS BY AREA AND BY SURVEY PERIOD

AREA	1990/91	1995/96	2002
Sri Lanka	30.4	26.7	23.9
Sector			
Urban	18.2	13.4	7.9
Rural	34.7	28.7	26.4
Estate	20.5	26.1	22.1
Province			
Western	20.1	12.2	12.2
Central	33.5	35.4	25.6
Southern	32.6	32.5	26.2
North Western	33.6	30.4	28.3
North Central	39.0	26.1	29.3
Uva	38.1	33.9	36.4
Sabaragamuwa	36.7	40.0	34.7
District			
Colombo	16.4	9.0	5.9
Gampaha	17.9	11.4	13.8
Kalutara	31.2	20.3	21.8
Kandy	37.4	36.3	25.7
Matale	36.6	45.7	31.1
Nuwara Eliya	22.6	28.7	21.7
Galle	30.7	32.1	17.8
Matara	32.2	34.8	29.5
Hambantota	36.8	30.3	37.8
Kurunegala	35.3	29.5	30.5
Puttalam	29.2	32.5	23.6
Anuradhapura	41.1	25.6	29.5
Polonnaruwa	34.1	27.3	29.0
Badulla	38.8	27.1	37.7
Monaragala	36.5	47.7	33.8
Ratnapura	31.6	44.1	37.4
Kegalle	42.2	35.5	31.5

Source: Preliminary Report Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2002 (DCS various years).

⁹ The DCS calculates the poverty line by using a modification of the CBN method. The poverty line is calculated as Rs. 1338.48 per adult equivalent per month

The sectoral analysis shows that poverty has remained a mainly rural phenomenon over the decades. Around 90 percent of the poor lived in the rural sector in 2002, in contrast to 5 percent each in the urban and estate sectors. In terms of trends, the declining trend in poverty is clearly evident in the urban as well as rural sectors while a mixed trend is observed in the estate sector, with a rise in poverty from 1990/91 to 1995/96 and a decline in poverty over the next 5 years. Vulnerability to fluctuations is highest in the rural sector, where a large share of the population is engaged in agriculture, which is subject to seasonality.

Regional disparities in poverty in Sri Lanka are reflected by the large gaps between the districts with the highest and lowest incidence of poverty. The regions that display high levels of poverty are also those with low access to publicly provided services and hence low achievements in human development indicators.

While there are no formal quantitative calculations on the incidence of poverty in the North East, the Poverty Reduction Framework (2000) estimated the incidence of poverty to range between 25-55 percent. The lower limit was based on the preliminary findings of the World Bank's Integrated Survey, which shows that poverty in the cleared areas of the North and East are similar to the national levels of poverty (25 percent), and the upper limit assumes that poverty in those regions are as high as the poorest province (Uva Province) in the country (World Bank 2000).

While the above estimates look purely at consumption poverty, it has been recognized that poverty in the North and East is of a different nature to the rest of country and should be measured in its multidimensional form. Loss of livelihoods, destruction of physical and social capital, forced displacement, uncertainty, trauma, and reliance on relief are some of the facets of poverty that are unique to this region.

Sarvananthan (2003) carries various socioeconomic data, which verify the fact that deprivation is greater in the strife-affected regions than in the rest of the country. Only 40 percent of households in the East and 22 percent of the households in the North have access to electricity, as against the national rate of 56 percent. Households with access to a safe water supply in the North and East are 20 percent, well below the national rate of 45 percent. While the above data indicates the lack of economic infrastructure in the regions, indicators of health care and education show that the region's social infrastructure faces a similar situation.

While secondary data on education in the region is extremely limited one could assume a significant deterioration in education over the past two decades. Recruitment of child soldiers, displacement, constant disruptions to schooling due to fighting and *hartals* are some of the reasons for the high school dropout rates; 15 percent as against 4 percent in the rest of the country. Furthermore, destruction of infrastructure and occupation of schools by armed forces throughout the region also severely hampered education standards (UN 2003).

Low birth weight in the North and East is 25.7 percent, home births are 19.4 percent, and infant mortality¹⁰ is 14.7, while the national figures for the indicators are 16.7, 4.0, and 15.4 percent, respectively. Although infant mortality in the North and East is slightly better than the national rate, it should be emphasized that Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, and Mannar districts (in the Northern Province) fared much worse, with infant mortality rates ranging from 20.3 to 27.8.

¹⁰ Infant mortality is measured as the number of deaths per 1,000 live births.

D. Characteristics of the Poor

From the statistical information obtained from various sources, a typical characterization of a poor household is one that is employed in low skill occupations, has diversified income sources, lacks ownership or access to productive assets, has only primary school level of education, could belong to any ethnic group, and has a large average household size and a high dependency ratio. This typical profile has not changed dramatically in the last three decades.

However, there are certain groups that make it necessary to go beyond the basic characterization of a poor household. The elderly is one such group as Sri Lanka's high achievements in human development in life expectancy and low population increase has created a population pyramid that resembles that of high income economies; a young generation at the base and a rapidly aging population at the top. The existence of a growing population of the elderly will make increasing demands on the country's welfare program.

Notwithstanding the high rates of consumption poverty in Sri Lanka, there is very little abject poverty—in terms of starvation and destitution—in the country. However, there are specific pockets within the population that do fall into this category, and are termed chronically poor. Displaced households, households in conflict areas, unemployed estate workers, households in isolated villages, and marginalized social groups fall into the category of chronically poor. Although the first three groups have received considerable recognition in the policy arena in recent years, the latter two have received little attention.

E. Causes of Poverty

A range of factors have been identified in the literature as causes of poverty in Sri Lanka. These causes, which have changed little over time, relate mainly to constraints in agriculture (weak marketing structures, low productivity, imperfect property rights, small farm size, shortfalls in access to water especially in the nonirrigated areas of the dry zone); rural industry (limited access and utilization of technology, poor production and quality standards, high capital costs, raw material and product marketing bottlenecks); infrastructure (shortfalls in physical infrastructure such as energy, communications, all weather roads); weak access to employment opportunities (youth unemployment, differential regional growth); and weak access to public services (lack of transport facilities, low quality of education and health care provision).

But perhaps the most critical factor in the well-being of the Sri Lankan nation is the ongoing secessionist conflict. It has a devastatingly impoverishing impact on the population of the North and East provinces and the villages bordering this region in the North Central and Uva provinces. These communities face multiple disadvantages of physical vulnerability, destroyed means of livelihood, and disruption in state provision of services and nonphysical aspects such as war trauma. The impoverishing impact is also felt in the rest of the country as the government shifts budgetary priorities away from welfare and development to deal with the strife. Meanwhile, investment and economic dynamism are adversely affected. Though the literature on the political and ethnic aspects of the conflict has been prolific, there is little that has been written on the impact of the conflict on poverty in the country. This issue is now being increasingly focused upon as relevant data becomes available and access to those regions is possible due to the ongoing ceasefire.

IV. DISTRIBUTION

A. Income Shares by Decile

The research interest in relative poverty in Sri Lanka closely reflects trends in the international debate as well as the changing policy orientation of the country. Until the major policy changes in 1977, the policy orientation leaned heavily toward redistributive considerations and hence paid much attention to equity and welfare issues. Interest in income distribution and relative poverty was very high. During the 1980s this interest waned and has now all but disappeared from the economic debate. It is now rare that relative poverty is mentioned explicitly as the economic development plans are laid out. This is despite the fact that both the Department of Census and Statistics and the Central Bank regularly provide tabulations of income distribution (a proxy measure of relative poverty) in their respective publications.

The following tables give the latest statistics describing the distribution of income within the population.

TABLE 7
INCOME RECEIVERS INCOME (AVERAGE MONTHLY) AND
SHARE OF INCOME BY INCOME RECEIVERS INCOME DECILE, 2002

DECILE (RS.)		MEAN INCOME	PERCENT
All Deciles		7079	100
1	Less than 801	395	0.6
2	801-1800	1292	1.8
3	1801-2683	2255	3.2
4	2684-3514	3102	4.4
5	3515- 4539	4021	5.7
6	4540-5617	5080	7.2
7	5618-7000	6318	9.3
8	7001-9000	7967	11.2
9	9001-13200	10835	14.9
10	More than 13200	29857	41.8

Source: *Preliminary Report HIES 2002* (DCS 2002).

TABLE 8
PER CAPITA INCOME PER MONTH BY INCOME DECILES, 2002

HOUSEHOLD INCOME DECILE (RS.)		PER CAPITA INCOME (RS.)	PERCENT OF SHARE
All deciles		3141	100
1	Less than 3301	701	2.42
2	3301-4660	1087	3.75
3	4661-5823	1364	4.7
4	5824-7000	1647	5.68
5	7001-8387	1835	6.32
6	8388-10000	2115	7.29
7	10001-12688	2507	8.64
8	12689-16390	3288	11.33
9	16391-24225	4335	14.94
10	24226 and above	10136	34.93

Source: Preliminary Report HIES 2002 (DCS 2002).

The income distribution situation prior to 2002 can be seen in Table 9. The data is for selected years in the three decades 1963 to 1996/97.

TABLE 9
INCOME DISTRIBUTION BY DECILE, SELECTED YEARS 1963-1996/97
(PERCENT OF INCOME RECEIVERS)

DECILE	1963	1973	78/79	81/82	86/87	90/91	96/97	2002
Lowest	1.17	1.80	1.19	1.17	1.09	1.9	1.3	0.6
Second	2.70	3.17	2.57	2.45	2.45	3.3	2.8	1.8
Third	3.56	4.38	3.57	3.41	3.40	4.3	3.9	3.2
Fourth	4.57	5.70	4.80	4.53	4.39	5.3	4.9	4.4
Fifth	5.55	7.10	5.93	5.53	5.69	6.4	6.1	5.7
Sixth	6.82	8.75	7.37	6.86	6.79	7.5	7.4	7.2
Seventh	8.98	10.56	9.10	8.54	8.37	9.2	9.1	9.3
Eighth	11.46	12.65	11.36	10.68	11.08	10.8	11.5	11.2
Ninth	16.01	15.26	15.36	14.87	15.37	14.9	15.7	14.9
Highest	39.24	29.98	38.73	41.93	41.37	36.5	37.3	41.8

Sources: CFS (CBSL 1964, 1974, 1981/82, and 1986/87); HIES (DCS 1997 and 2002).

There is an emphatic improvement in distribution in the first decade covered by the data, as the share of the poorest of income receivers represented by the lowest three deciles in the distribution as a proportion of the richest represented by the highest decile, increased from 18.9 percent in 1963 to 31.2 percent in 1973.

There is clear deterioration from 1973 to 1981/83 as the share of the lowest three deciles as a proportion of the share of the topmost decile fell from 31.2 to 19.2 percent; a clear improvement from 1981/82 to 1990/91 from 19.2 to 26.0 percent; and an unambiguous deterioration from 1990/91 to 2002, from 26.0 percent in 1990/91, to 21.4 percent in 1995/96, to finally 13.4 percent in 2002.

It is thus not easy to come to any firm conclusions regarding the trends in the relative position of the poor in the income distribution structure in Sri Lanka. However, looking only at the terminal years of the data, one can say that the relative position of the poor has deteriorated in the last four decades. The income of the poorest in the country fell from 18.9 percent of the income of the richest in 1963 to 13.4 percent in 2002.

B. Sectoral Distribution

The Lorenz curve type of analysis seems to confirm the above analysis. The Gini concentration coefficient is shown on Table 10 for several selected years for the period 1963-2002.

TABLE 10
GINI COEFFICIENT OF CONCENTRATION FOR INCOME RECEIVERS

SECTOR	1963	1973	78/79	81/82	86/87	90/91	95/96	2002
Urban	0.49	0.40	0.51	0.54	0.53	0.58	0.53	0.55
Rural	0.44	0.37	0.49	0.49	0.50	0.53	0.52	0.51
Estate	0.27	0.37	0.32	0.32	0.31	0.36	0.37	0.39
Sri Lanka	0.49	0.41	0.49	0.52	0.52	0.52	0.52	0.55

Sources: HIES (DCS various years); CFS (CBSL various years).

The coefficient suggests a clear improvement in distribution from 1963 to 1973, as it fell from 0.49 to 0.41 over the 10-year period. However, it worsened therefrom, as it rose to 0.49 in 1978/79, to 0.52 over 1981/82-1995/96, and to 0.55 in 2002. It has been argued that the improvement in the first decade of the data came in the wake of the pro-welfare focus of the national policies up to 1977 and the deterioration thereafter as the aftermath of the policy restructuring toward economic growth. However the debate goes, the causes underpinning the change in income distribution remain to be unravelled.

C. Consumption Distribution

The same decline in the relative standing of the poor in Sri Lankan society can be seen in the distribution of consumption expenditure, as shown in Table 11. The consumption expenditure of the poorest—the three lowest deciles—as a percentage of the consumption expenditure of the richest—the topmost decile—fell from 42.9 percent in 1995/96 to 31.4 percent in 2002.

TABLE 11
MEAN HOUSEHOLD CONSUMPTION EXPENDITURE, BY EXPENDITURE DECILE, 1995/96 AND 2002

DECILES	1995/96	PERCENT	2002	PERCENT
All Deciles	6525	100	13733	100
Lowest	1879	2.87	3305	2.4
Second	2834	4.34	5047	3.67
Third	3473	5.31	6294	4.58
Fourth	4033	6.17	7637	5.56
Fifth	4653	7.12	9010	6.56
Sixth	5360	8.2	10565	7.69
Seventh	6336	9.69	12532	9.12
Eighth	7719	11.81	15367	11.18
Ninth	10009	15.31	21014	15.29
Highest	19062	29.16	46645	33.94

Source: HIES 1995/96 and 2002 (DCS various years)).

V. NONINCOME INDICATORS

A. Education

Data on education in Sri Lanka comes from the various sources of the Department of Census and Statistics. The Ministry of Education has a specialized database on students, teachers, and facilities of schools, by category, in all the country's regions.

The importance of education as a fundamental right of citizens has long been recognized by the Government of Sri Lanka. The recognition is operationalized in the form of state provision of universal free education. It is a measure of the success of the government's educational program that the current literacy rate for males is 94 percent and for females 91 percent. There is near universal enrolment at the primary level.

The relationship of this high level of achievement in the educational field with poverty eradication is, however less clear. From the various studies that have been conducted looking into the correlation between education levels and earning capacity, the general conclusion seems to be that there is no positive correlation between primary education and income generation capacity. Most poor households are literate and have on average eight years of education. However, secondary education and to a greater extent tertiary education have the potential to lift households out of poverty.

The current debate on education in Sri Lanka focuses on the quality of education. The data on the performance of students at the three public examinations allows an analysis of quality to a certain extent. However, such an examination is handicapped by data gaps on teaching methods, curriculum, etc.

B. Health and Nutrition

Health is a sector with one of the most varied databases. The data collected by the Department of Census and Statistics is complemented by Ministry of Health sources. Detailed data pertain to disease and epidemiology and the primary health care system, and include such information as doctor-patient ratios, hospitals per square area, beds per capita, etc. As in the case of education, the current research is focused strongly on the quality of health care.

Nutrition poses a special problem in Sri Lanka. Malnutrition, especially among young children, continues to cast a very dark shadow on Sri Lanka's human development achievements. Over 38 percent of the below five age group suffer from malnutrition. The disaggregated data on income show that over 90 percent of the bottommost quintile of income earners obtain less than the recommended calorie intake. Within this group the most serious problem lies with the urban sector households, and, in terms of occupational category, with agricultural workers. However, there is a high rate of prevalence among the nonpoor as well. Approximately 10 percent of children under five in the highest income quintile are malnourished.

C. Employment

Unemployment is an indicator of poverty as well as a key source of welfare. The data on employment comes mainly from the Central Bank's Consumer Finances Survey, the Department of Census and Statistics' Labour Force and Socio-Economic Surveys, and the subsequent Labour Force Surveys. The data is disaggregated by employment sectors, occupational type, region, gender, and age.

Employment generation is currently at the top of the government's agenda. There is particular concern for youth employment, a matter spurred by the youth insurgencies of 1971 and 1989/90, which was said to have been the result of frustration among the educated youth over the failure of the economy to meet the students' higher aspirations. Attention is also being focused on such issues as mismatch, "who gains, who loses" in the sectoral growth process, the female bias of poststructural adjustment employment generation, the rise of child (10-14 age group) employment, changes in the quality of employment (based on the level in the occupational ladder), and the "informalization" of the labor market.

For the immediate present, the focus of research is the restructuring of labor laws and wages.

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The combined portfolio of quantitative data available through the Department of Census and Statistics, Central Bank of Sri Lanka, and other line ministry sources is fairly comprehensive. However, a major issue that arises is the comparability of the various data sets. The data sets collected by line ministries and departments are frequently supervised by DCS staff members but suffer from comparability problems mainly in terms of time periods used, spatial units, and at times definitions of the indicators.

On poverty issues, though the debate has a long history, gaps exist and questions regarding the poverty line remained unsolved. As this paper covers this period of uncertainty, calculations of poverty incidence, income, or consumption distribution among income groups or across sectors, as briefly discussed in this paper, are at best tentative. However, the most recent outputs by the DCS (see Appendix 1) may go a very long way toward closing these gaps. The official poverty line declared by the DCS after a lengthy and comprehensive study of the issues involved has raised poverty measurement in Sri Lanka to a new standard and will shift the debate to a higher level.

APPENDIX

DEPARTMENT OF CENSUS AND STATISTICS: OFFICIAL POVERTY LINE FOR SRI LANKA

The Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) released the official poverty line for Sri Lanka in June 2004. This annex provides a summary of the methodology used by the Department of Census and Statistics in calculating the official poverty line, and the arising measures and trends in poverty.¹¹

Summary of the Official Poverty Line

- (i) Official Poverty Line for 2002: Rs. 1423
- (ii) Interpretation of the Official Poverty Line: Persons living in households whose real per capita monthly total consumption expenditure is below Rs. 1423 in 2002 in Sri Lanka are considered poor
- (iii) Type of Poverty Line: Absolute poverty line
- (iv) Base Method: Cost of Basic Needs (CBN) method
- (v) Data Source: Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2002

Calculating the Poverty Line

- (i) Calculating the caloric requirement

Step 1: National *aggregate* of daily calorie allowances is determined based on the nutritional requirements by age and sex as calculated by the Medical Research Institute of Sri Lanka, with the population subdivided into age and sex as given by the HIES 2002.

Step 2: The *average* calorie allowance is calculated by dividing the national aggregate by the total population. Given as 2030 kcal per capita per day in 2002.

- (ii) Calculating the food poverty line

Step 3: A reference group comprising the 2nd-4th deciles in the real per capita total consumption expenditure is selected.

Step 4: All food items, which have information on quantity, expenditure, and estimated caloric value are selected.

Step 5: Based on the above information, the aggregates of the food expenditure and caloric intakes in the reference group are calculated.

Step 6: Cost per calorie = aggregate food expenditure / aggregate caloric intake in reference group

Step 7: Per calorie cost multiplied by nutritional anchor per month provides the food poverty line.

¹¹ For details please refer to: <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/poverty/OfficialPovertyLineBuletin.pdf>.

(iii) Calculating the nonfood component of the poverty line

Step 8: The lower and upper bound for the nonfood component is calculated. The lower bound is derived by calculating the average per capita nonfood expenditure of households whose per capita *total* expenditure is 10 percent (plus or minus) from the food poverty line. The upper bound is derived by calculating the average per capita nonfood expenditure of households' whose per capita *food* expenditure is 10 percent (plus or minus) from the food poverty line.

Step 9: The upper (lower) total poverty line = food poverty line + upper (lower) nonfood component,

Lower poverty line = 973 + 294

Lower poverty line = Rs. 1267 per person per month

Upper poverty line = 973 + 606

Upper poverty line = Rs. 1579 per person per month

Step 10: The national poverty line is the average of the upper and lower total poverty line.

National poverty line = (upper poverty line + lower poverty line)/ 2

National poverty line = (1267+ 1578)/ 2

National poverty line at 2002 national prices = Rs. 1423 per person per month

(iv) Calculating poverty lines for different years

The poverty lines for the for the years 1990/91 and 1995/96 are calculated by deflating the 2002 poverty line by the Colombo Consumer Price Index.

Official poverty lines in previous survey years at current prices are:

1990/91 = Rs. 475 per person per month

1995/96 = Rs. 833 per person per month

The poverty line for 2004 was calculated using the Sri Lanka Consumer Price Index on the 2002 poverty line: total poverty line for 2004 = Rs. 1526 per person per month.

(v) Regional poverty lines

The DCS further calculates district poverty lines by adopting spatial price indices for each district. It is computed as a "Laspeyres" index using implicit prices of food items for the reference group, which consists of the 2nd-4th deciles.

APPENDIX TABLE 1
NOMINAL POVERTY LINES BY DISTRICT

DISTRICT	1990/91	1995/96	2002
National	475	833	1423
Colombo	518	908	1537
Gampaha	489	875	1508
Kalutara	494	866	1523
Kandy	485	850	1451
Matale	466	816	1395
Nuwara Eliya	494	841	1437
Galle	489	833	1466
Matara	470	816	1395
Hambantota	470	791	1338
Kurunegala	456	791	1352
Puttalam	461	841	1423
Anuradhapura	456	816	1380
Polonnaruwa	475	783	1366
Badulla	485	850	1409
Moneragala	480	701	1366
Rathnapura	494	833	1451
Kegalle	466	858	1437

Source: Department of Census and Statistics (2004).

The district poverty lines adjust for “cost of living” differences among the various districts. Colombo records the highest poverty line in 2002, followed by Gampaha, Kalutara, (the other two districts in the western Province), Galle, and Kandy, which are the most urbanized five districts in the country. Hambantota and Moneragala have the lowest poverty lines, implying lower prices of consumer commodities and hence better living standards than the rest of the country, at a given level of consumption expenditure.

Poverty Measures per New Official Poverty Line

APPENDIX TABLE 2
POVERTY HEADCOUNT RATIO (PERCENT)

SPATIAL UNIT	1990/91	1995/96	2002
National	26.1	28.8	22.7
Sector			
Urban	16.3	14.0	7.9
Rural	29.4	30.9	24.7
Estate	20.5	38.4	30.0
District			
Colombo	16	12	6
Gampaha	15	14	11
Kalutara	32	29	20
Kandy	36	37	25
Matale	29	42	30
Nuwara Eliya	20	32	23
Galle	30	32	26
Matara	29	35	27
Hambantota	32	31	32
Kurunegala	27	26	25
Puttalam	22	31	31
Anuradhapura	24	27	20
Polonnaruwa	24	20	24
Badulla	31	41	37
Monaragala	34	56	37
Rathnapura	31	46	34
Kegalle	31	36	32

Source: Official Poverty Line for Sri Lanka (DCS 2004).

APPENDIX TABLE 3
PERCENTAGE OF POOR HOUSEHOLDS
(BASED ON THE OFFICIAL POVERTY LINE; PERCENT)

SPATIAL UNIT	1990/91	1995/96	2002
Sri Lanka	21.8	24.3	19.2
Sector			
Urban	12.9	11.0	6.2
Rural	24.7	25.9	20.8
Estate	16.7	32.2	24.3
Province			
Western	15.6	13.0	9.2
Central	25.8	31.3	20.8
Southern	24.7	27.0	23.6
North Western	21.6	23.6	22.3
North Central	20.4	20.4	18.1
Uva	27.0	40.2	31.8
Sabaragamuwa	26.8	36.1	28.9
District			
Colombo	13.1	8.8	5.0
Gampaha	11.7	11.3	9.2
Kalutara	27.0	24.6	17.7
Kandy	30.9	32.7	20.9
Matale	24.3	36.8	24.5
Nuwara Eliya	15.6	25.9	18.2
Galle	25.0	25.5	21.7
Matara	23.3	29.5	23.2
Hambantota	26.3	26.2	27.8
Kurunegala	22.8	22.6	21.2
Puttalam	18.6	25.8	24.5
Anuradhapura	20.1	21.9	17.2
Polonnaruwa	21.2	17.1	20.1
Badulla	26.8	35.8	31.5
Monaragala	27.4	48.4	32.4
Rathnapura	26.4	40.0	30.1
Kegalle	27.3	31.7	27.5

Source: Official Poverty Line for Sri Lanka (DCS 2004).

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